



## Oil spill claims administrator grilled on Capitol Hill

By Maya Rodriguez / Eyewitness News

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WASHINGTON - The man in charge of paying out billions of dollars to those affected by the oil spill in Gulf of Mexico testified on Capitol Hill Thursday. Ken Feinberg faced a number of questions, mainly about why there are payment delays for thousands oil spill claims.

"Nine months since the oil spill, 57 percent of claims in Alabama remain unpaid," said Sen. Richard Shelby, R-Alabama.

"As in any big organization, somewhere it has broken down," Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Florida.

Senator Mary Landrieu, who chairs the subcommittee, said most of the complaints she is hearing about have to do with claims, which are denied for no specific reason.

"There doesn't seem to be any explanation and people then get very frustrated-- they don't even know where to begin, should they completely re-file, what didn't they understand. This is a real problem," said Sen. Landrieu, D-Louisiana.

Feinberg responded agreed with the criticism, but said the issue was not widespread.

"It is a problem, but I must say the great majority of people don't have this problem," Feinberg said.

Senator David Vitter also asked Feinberg about why claims coming from the fishing industry appear to be having to most trouble getting approved. Sen. Vitter also brought up the fact that Feinberg's name is floating around as a possible administrator of a federal fund for the 9-11 responders-- similar to the fund for 9-11 victims that Feinberg previously handled.

"Will you publicly state that you will not take the 9-11 first responder job or any other big public project, until this claim facility is fully closed down?" asked Sen. Vitter, R-Louisiana.

Feinberg said he would not make that statement.

"Senator, I don't see how I can," Feinberg responded. "I don't want to be publicly state absolutely I won't because, first of all, no one has asked me."

Vitter swiftly responded that he was "disappointed" with that answer.

"I would suggest, given that this is a big unfinished job, that the answer should be public and unequivocal, that no you won't do that-- and you won't do anything like that until this facility is completely closed down," Sen. Vitter said.

Senator Landrieu added that the facility appears to be faltering in its mission, to finish paying out the \$20 billion dollars set aside for those affected by the spill.

"I am getting more and more convinced unfortunately that there is something lost between your vision and what is happening on the ground," she said.

As the hearing wrapped up, Sen. Landrieu announced plans for another Senate subcommittee hearing in the next three to four weeks. This time, she said she plans to call the chief operating officers of the Gulf Coast Claims Facility to answer questions about problems with the claims process.